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HOW IT WORKS: Galaxy Group of Companies deputy chairman Tony Bee (left) demonstrates the function of a product at an exhibition held as part of the conference to Dr Chan (centre). Looking on are (from left) chairman of board of directors of Unimas Tan Sri Datuk Amar Bujang Mohd Nor, Infrastructure Development and Communication Assistant Minister Datuk Lee Kim Shin and Cita organising chairman Associate Professor Dr Alvin Yeo.

Taib calls for enhancement of speech-recognition technology

By Ting Tieng Hee

KUCHING: Chief Minister Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud yesterday hoped speech-recognition technology could become a tool to preserve the traditional knowledge of ethnic groups in the state.

He said there was a need

to enhance speech-recognition technology to speed up the process of converting speech to text so that the text could be stored and analysed.

"Machine translation software, which Unimas (Universiti Malaysia Sarawak) has begun research in, should be developed for the local

languages so that these indigenous languages can be translated to say English, knowledge which can be made accessible to all," he added.

Taib said this in his text of speech which was read by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr George Chan at the opening of the Tenth Conference on

Information Technology in Asia (Cita) at Hilton Kuching.

The chief minister said there was much to be learnt from the more than 28 ethnic groups in the state, the knowledge that they had in regard to health, history and their ways of life.

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Unimas commended for bringing ICT to rural folk

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"Likewise, information in English or Bahasa Malaysia can be translated to Iban or Melanau to ensure the younger generations have access to information in their mother tongue.

"Furthermore, with all these digitised indigenous information, semantic technologies can be exploited to uncover new knowledge," he added.

Taib commended Unimas Centre of Excellence for Rural Informatics (Coeri) for identifying various ways to bring ICT to rural communities, focusing on power generation and transmission of electricity and finding alternative energy resources that could be applied in the areas.

He said one such project undertaken by the university that had helped to bridge the digital divide between the urban and rural areas was the eBario project.

He said the project had since garnered numerous international recognitions

for efforts in transforming a remote rural community to face global challenges.

Taib said the Bario community was now able to independently maintain the telecentre and related equipment, adding that it was now further looking to become a pilot role model broadband network site for remote communities.

He said Unimas would also be at the heart of the state's multimedia super corridor activities, particularly looking at the incubation facilities for technology startups and in addressing the state's human resource development needs.

On the theme for this year's conference, 'Towards Human-Centred Computing', Taib said it was befitting as the organisers had successfully tied in the theme with today's technology related issues in affecting the people's everyday lives.

"As we move towards technological advancement, the blending of human and computer processing

becomes instrumental. With computers becoming our powerful personal assistant, we need to ensure that technological development is seen in the right perspective," he pointed out.

Cita organising chairman Associate Professor Dr Alvin Yeo of Unimas said at this year's conference, "a holistic view would be taken not to only examine and address the issues from a technological perspective, but also taking into account the human aspect and the interplay between the two.

Saying that there was a shift in focus from a technology-centric focus on ICTs to one that was more human-centric, Yeo added that technology, no matter how advanced, would only be useful if people who used the technologies were taken into account.

He said there would be five best paper awards at the conference, four for full papers and one for short paper. These best papers will be featured in Journal of IT in Asia.

The conference organised by Unimas Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology attracted 126 participants.

Fifty-one papers will be presented by local and international researchers, including from Massachusetts Institute of Technology of the US and Technology University of Graz in Austria at the three-day event.

Topics and issues include image processing, community informatics, software engineering and knowledge management, computational and theoretical science, human computer interaction, and government and industry.

Infrastructure Development and Communication Assistant Minister Datuk Lee Kim Shin, Assistant Minister in the Chief Minister's Department Datin Fatimah Abdullah, chairman of Unimas board of directors Tan Sri Datuk Amar Bujang Mohd Nor and deputy vice-chancellor Dr Peter Songan.